

Implementation of Grassroots Curriculum Development Model in Indonesia: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the implementation of grassroots curriculum development model in Indonesia through literature review method. The grassroots model emphasizes a bottom-up approach involving active participation of teachers, students, and local communities in developing curriculum that is responsive to contextual needs. Educational decentralization in Indonesia provides autonomy for teachers to develop curricula relevant to local conditions, which is strengthened through the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka in 2022. This literature review analyzes journal articles from 2020–2025 period sourced from SINTA, Scopus, and Google Scholar databases, as well as theoretical literature and policy documents using thematic content analysis. Research findings indicate that the grassroots model has strong potential to produce contextual and inclusive curricula that support future-ready education. The implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka demonstrates the strengthening of teachers' roles as primary curriculum developers, although it still faces structural and individual challenges such as limited teacher competencies, inadequate training, insufficient infrastructure, and resistance to change. Success factors supporting implementation include school leadership support, development of professional learning communities, consistent policies, and multi-stakeholder collaboration. This study recommends a holistic approach through sustainable and contextual teacher capacity building, strengthening school leadership support, measured central-local policy harmonization, and development of participatory evaluation mechanisms to optimize the implementation of grassroots-based curriculum development model in Indonesia.

Keywords: *educational decentralization, grassroots model, literature review, merdeka curriculum*

1. INTRODUCTION

Curriculum development remains a central concern in educational reform globally, particularly in contexts marked by socio-cultural and geographical diversity. The traditional top-down approach to curriculum design has increasingly been critiqued for its inability to respond to local contextual needs and diverse learner populations (Marsh & Willis, 2007). In response, the grassroots curriculum development model has emerged as an alternative paradigm emphasizing bottom-up participation, localized adaptation, and stakeholder empowerment (Taba, 1962; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2019).

Indonesia, as an archipelagic nation with remarkable ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity, presents a compelling case for examining grassroots curriculum development. Following educational decentralization policies in the late 1990s, Indonesian schools gained increased autonomy in curriculum adaptation (Bjork, 2005).

This autonomy was further strengthened through Kurikulum Merdeka (Independent Curriculum) in 2022, which positions teachers as primary curriculum developers with substantial flexibility in designing learning experiences responsive to local contexts (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

Despite this policy shift, implementation faces multifaceted challenges including limited teacher competencies in curriculum design, inadequate professional development, infrastructural constraints, and resistance to pedagogical change (Sumartono et al., 2024; Wardana, 2024). Tensions persist between centralized policy mandates and local autonomy, creating implementation gaps requiring systematic investigation (Dewi, 2021; Arif et al., 2022).

This study draws upon three interconnected frameworks: Taba's grassroots curriculum development model, educational decentralization theory, and participatory development approaches. Hilda Taba (1962) pioneered the grassroots approach, consisting of seven sequential steps: diagnosing learner needs, formulating objectives, selecting and organizing content, selecting and organizing learning experiences, and determining evaluation procedures (Portillo et al., 2020). The model prioritizes teacher agency, recognizing educators as curriculum designers rather than mere implementers (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018), and demands systematic needs assessment based on learners' actual characteristics (Zahara et al., 2025).

Contemporary scholars have expanded Taba's framework to encompass broader stakeholder participation including students, parents, community members, and local knowledge holders (Almadani et al., 2023), aligning with culturally responsive pedagogy emphasizing integration of local wisdom into formal curricula (Fitrianto & Farisi, 2025).

Educational decentralization refers to transferring authority for educational decision-making from central to regional or local levels (Hanushek et al., 2013). Research reveals complex relationships between policy frameworks and actual implementation, with effectiveness depending on adequate local capacity, sufficient resources, clear policy guidance, and supportive accountability systems. In Indonesian contexts, significant variation exists in how schools exercise curriculum autonomy, influenced by school leadership capacity, teacher competence, community engagement, and district-level support (Arif et al., 2022; Juniar & Prasetyo, 2025).

Research on educational decentralization reveals Participatory approaches extend beyond teacher involvement to encompass multiple stakeholder groups with legitimate interests in educational outcomes (Epstein, 2011; Fullan, 2007). Diverse stakeholder perspectives enrich curriculum design by introducing varied forms of knowledge, values, and priorities, while participation fosters ownership and commitment, increasing likelihood of successful implementation (Hargreaves & Fullan,

2015). Effective stakeholder participation requires structured processes, transparent communication, and power-sharing mechanisms (Obi, 2004

While extensive international literature examines grassroots curriculum development and educational decentralization separately, systematic investigation of grassroots model implementation in Indonesian educational contexts remains limited. The recent Kurikulum Merdeka introduction represents a significant policy experiment requiring systematic documentation and analysis. This literature review addresses these gaps by systematically synthesizing empirical and theoretical literature on grassroots curriculum development implementation in Indonesia. Specifically, this study aims to analyze conceptual foundations and characteristics of grassroots curriculum development models in Indonesian contexts, identify implementation patterns, challenges, and success factors across diverse Indonesian educational settings, examine the role of Kurikulum Merdeka policy in strengthening or constraining grassroots approaches, and synthesize evidence-based recommendations for optimizing grassroots curriculum development implementation in Indonesia.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

This study employed literature review methodology using thematic content analysis to systematically examine grassroots curriculum development models implementation in Indonesia. Literature review represents a rigorous research method involving identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing existing research and theoretical literature to address specific research questions (Snyder, 2019; Paré et al., 2017). The thematic approach organizes findings around key themes and patterns emerging across studies, enabling comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena from multiple perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

2.2. Literature Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted across three major academic databases: SINTA (Science and Technology Index), Scopus, and Google Scholar. Searches employed combinations of Indonesian and English keywords including “grassroots curriculum development,” “*pengembangan kurikulum* grassroots,” “*Kurikulum Merdeka*,” “curriculum autonomy,” and “decentralized curriculum” using Boolean operators. The temporal scope focused on publications from 2020 to 2025 to capture contemporary developments, particularly the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka launched in 2022, while foundational theoretical literature predating this period was included to establish conceptual frameworks.

Inclusion criteria comprised: (a) peer-reviewed journal articles or scholarly book chapters; (b) studies explicitly addressing curriculum development or implementation

at school or classroom level in Indonesia; and (c) full-text availability in Indonesian or English. Exclusion criteria included non-academic sources (e.g., news, blogs), duplicate publications, and studies that only mention curriculum superficially without discussing its development or implementation processes.

2.3. Data Extraction and Analysis Techniques

Data extraction was conducted using a structured matrix to record bibliographic information, research aims, context and participants, research design, and key findings related to: (1) conceptualizations of grassroots curriculum development, (2) forms of teacher and community participation, (3) opportunities and challenges within the Kurikulum Merdeka framework, and (4) enabling and constraining factors in school-level implementation. Extracted information from each source was compared and consolidated to allow cross-study analysis and to reduce the risk of misinterpretation of individual studies.

The selected literature was then analyzed using thematic content analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase process, adapted for literature reviews by Vaismoradi et al. (2013): (1) familiarization with the data through systematic reading; (2) generating initial codes identifying concepts, practices, challenges, and factors relevant to grassroots curriculum development; (3) searching for themes by grouping codes into preliminary thematic clusters; (4) reviewing themes through iterative comparison with the original data and across studies; (5) defining and naming themes, including clarifying hierarchical relationships between main themes and subthemes; and (6) producing a synthesis that integrates themes into a coherent narrative addressing the research questions, supported by evidence from multiple sources. This approach positions the study as a qualitative, interpretive synthesis rather than a quantitative meta-analysis.

2.4. Validity and Methodological Limitations

Several strategies were employed to enhance the validity and credibility of the review. First, search procedures, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and analytical steps were reported transparently to allow traceability of the review process. Second, relevance and consistency of included studies were cross-checked by revisiting abstracts and full texts during coding and theme refinement. Third, triangulation was pursued by comparing themes emerging from empirical studies, theoretical works, and policy documents to strengthen the robustness of interpretations.

Despite these efforts, the study has methodological limitations. The review is restricted to publications indexed in selected databases (SINTA, Scopus, and Google Scholar) and to works published in Indonesian and English, which may lead to the omission of relevant studies available in other databases or languages. In addition, the reliance on thematic synthesis without quantitative meta-analysis means that the

findings are context-dependent and not intended for statistical generalization. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the conclusions and implications regarding the implementation of grassroots curriculum development models in Indonesia.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The thematic analysis revealed five interconnected themes characterizing grassroots curriculum development implementation in Indonesia: (1) conceptualization and potential of grassroots approaches, (2) teacher roles and capacity challenges, (3) structural and systemic barriers, (4) enabling factors and success conditions, and (5) policy-practice dynamics in the Kurikulum Merdeka context.

3.1. Conceptualization and Potential of Grassroots Curriculum Development

The literature conceptualizes grassroots curriculum development as a bottom-up, participatory approach fundamentally reconceptualizing power relationships in educational decision-making. Studies describe grassroots models as inverting traditional hierarchies by positioning teachers, students, and communities as primary curriculum designers rather than passive recipients of centrally mandated programs (Almadani et al., 2023; Oliva, 2017), aligning with Taba's (1962) foundational premise that those closest to the learning process possess essential expertise for designing effective, contextually responsive curricula.

Indonesian scholarship emphasizes relevance of grassroots approaches in the nation's diverse socio-cultural landscape. Indonesia's ethnic, linguistic, and cultural plurality demands curriculum development processes that can integrate local wisdom (*kearifan lokal*) and community knowledge into formal education. Studies document how grassroots approaches enable this integration through participatory processes valuing multiple knowledge systems (Pertwi et al., 2025; Fitrianto & Farisi, 2025), serving dual purposes: preserving cultural heritage while making learning more meaningful to students lived experiences.

The reviewed literature identifies multiple potential benefits: contextual relevance with curricula demonstrating stronger alignment with local conditions and learner characteristics; enhanced learner engagement when curricula incorporate familiar cultural references and community connections; and potential for fostering inclusive education by accommodating diverse learner needs through flexible, differentiated curriculum design (Novrizal & Manaf, 2024; Paramita, 2023). However, the literature acknowledges tensions regarding potential conflicts between grassroots flexibility and needs for educational standardization, credential portability, and quality assurance (Dewi, 2021).

3.2. Teacher Roles and Capacity Challenges

A dominant theme concerns teachers' central yet challenging role in grassroots curriculum development. Theoretically, grassroots models position teachers as primary curriculum designers empowered to make professional decisions about curriculum content, pedagogy, and assessment (Taba, 1962; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2019). Kurikulum Merdeka explicitly articulates this vision, describing teachers as "facilitators of independent learning" with substantial autonomy (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

However, empirical evidence reveals significant gaps between this aspirational vision and teachers' actual capacities. Multiple Indonesian studies identify limited teacher competencies in curriculum development as a major implementation barrier (Wardana, 2024; Efendi et al., 2025; Sumartono et al., 2024). Specific competency gaps include: limited knowledge of curriculum development principles and theoretical frameworks (Purwati & Sukirman, 2024); difficulty conducting systematic learner needs assessments (Zahara et al., 2025); challenges ensuring coherent alignment among learning objectives, instructional content, teaching methods, and assessment strategies (Zendrato & Agatha, 2023); limited capacity to design curricula accommodating diverse learner needs (Nasir et al., 2025); and insufficient digital literacy to integrate educational technology (Tjalla & Sunubi, 2024).

These capacity limitations reflect broader challenges in Indonesia's teacher education and professional development systems. Historical emphasis on teachers as curriculum implementers rather than designers has not adequately prepared educators for autonomous curriculum development roles. Pre-service teacher education programs often provide limited instruction in curriculum development, while in-service professional development opportunities remain insufficient in quality, duration, and accessibility, particularly in rural regions (Firdaus et al., 2023).

3.3. Structural and Systemic Barriers

Beyond individual teacher capacity, the literature identifies multiple structural and systemic barriers operating at organizational, institutional, and policy levels. Resource constraints represent fundamental challenges, particularly in economically disadvantaged regions, with insufficient instructional materials, limited technological infrastructure, inadequate physical facilities, and lack of financial resources (Wardana, 2024; Sumartono et al., 2024). Rural and remote schools face especially acute resource limitations, creating significant equity concerns (Tjalla & Sunubi, 2024).

Professional development systems emerge as inadequately designed to support grassroots curriculum implementation, with systemic weaknesses including episodic rather than sustained professional learning opportunities, generic training failing to address context-specific challenges, insufficient follow-up support and mentoring,

limited opportunities for collaborative learning, and inadequate time allocated for curriculum development work (Firdaus et al., 2023; Purwati & Sukirman, 2024).

Administrative and leadership capacity significantly influences grassroots implementation at school level. School principals and leadership teams play critical roles in creating enabling conditions, yet studies indicate substantial variation in Indonesian school leadership capacity, with many principals lacking training in instructional leadership or curriculum management (Juniar & Prasetyo, 2025). Policy ambiguity and inconsistency create implementation challenges, with teachers reporting uncertainty about boundaries of autonomy and quality standards (Zendrato & Agatha, 2023; Wardana, 2024). Additionally, central-local government coordination presents ongoing challenges, with insufficient coordination mechanisms between administrative levels resulting in conflicting guidance, inefficient resource allocation, and weak accountability systems (Desimaria & Rahayu, 2022; Fatimah et al., 2024).

Administrative and leadership capacity significantly influences grassroots implementation at school level. School principals and leadership teams play critical roles in creating enabling conditions: establishing shared vision and clear expectations for curriculum work, providing resources and time for teachers to engage in curriculum development, modeling and supporting pedagogical innovation, facilitating collaborative structures and professional learning communities, and buffering teachers from external pressures while maintaining accountability (Gunnulfsen & Abrahamsen, 2024; Salawana, 2019). However, studies indicate substantial variation in Indonesian school leadership capacity, with many principals lacking training in instructional leadership or curriculum management (Juniar & Prasetyo, 2025). Furthermore, competing administrative demands and bureaucratic requirements often consume principals' time and attention, limiting their capacity to provide instructional leadership.

3.4 Enabling Factors and Success Conditions

Despite substantial challenges, the literature identifies multiple factors enabling successful grassroots curriculum implementation. Strong instructional leadership emerges as perhaps the most critical success factor, with effective schools featuring principals and leadership teams who articulate clear vision, provide tangible support, actively participate in curriculum development processes, and create safe environments for experimentation (Gunnulfsen & Abrahamsen, 2024; Tusianah et al., 2019).

Professional learning communities (PLCs) constitute powerful structures for supporting teacher learning and curriculum development, characterized by regular structured collaboration time, shared responsibility for student learning outcomes, collective examination of student work, collaborative curriculum design, and reflective inquiry (DuFour et al., 2016; Vescio et al., 2008). Indonesian studies document how

PLCs reduce teacher isolation, enable knowledge sharing, build collective efficacy, and create spaces for innovation (Wardana, 2024; Rahmadani et al., 2025).

Stakeholder participation and community engagement enhance curriculum relevance and implementation support. Schools successfully implementing grassroots approaches demonstrate active engagement with parents, community members, local organizations, and students themselves as curriculum co-designers (Epstein, 2011). Contextually responsive professional development proves more effective than generic training, featuring sustained engagement, embedded learning opportunities, differentiation based on context-specific needs, collaborative structures, and ongoing coaching support (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Supportive policy environments balance flexibility with structure through clear articulation of curriculum aims, explicit guidance on scope of local autonomy, quality standards focusing on learning outcomes, and coherent alignment across policy levels (OECD, 2024; Rahmadani et al., 2025).

3.5. Policy-Practice Dynamics in Kurikulum Merdeka Implementation

The implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka since 2022 represents Indonesia's most explicit policy effort to institutionalize grassroots curriculum development at scale. Analysis reveals both promising developments and persistent challenges. Positive developments include increased teacher awareness and engagement with curriculum autonomy, with growing recognition of their roles as curriculum developers and appreciation for flexibility to adapt teaching to student needs (Zendrato & Agatha, 2023; Purwati & Sukirman, 2024). Kurikulum Merdeka's staged implementation provides flexibility for capacity development and reduces pressure for premature implementation (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

However, significant implementation challenges persist. The policy's flexibility creates interpretation difficulties, with teachers expressing confusion about boundaries of autonomy and quality expectations (Wardana, 2024). Systemic capacity constraints limit schools' ability to fully utilize granted autonomy, particularly in resource-limited settings (Sumartono et al., 2024). Assessment and evaluation systems have not fully evolved to align with Kurikulum Merdeka's competency-based approach, creating tensions between innovative curriculum and traditional assessment (Nasir et al., 2025).

Policy sustainability depends on ongoing commitment to capacity building and resource provision, maintenance of policy coherence, development of robust evaluation systems, and genuine responsiveness to implementation feedback. Research indicates that substantive change typically requires 5-7 years of sustained implementation, demanding political will and systemic commitment beyond initial reform enthusiasm (Fullan, 2007).

3.6. Synthesis and Theoretical Implications

Synthesizing findings reveals several overarching insights. First, grassroots curriculum development represents not merely a technical design process but fundamental reconceptualization of professional roles, power relationships, and knowledge valuation in education systems. Second, the relationship between policy autonomy and actual practice proves complex and mediated by multiple factors. Simply granting autonomy through policy does not automatically translate into grassroots curriculum development. Third, grassroots curriculum development implementation presents inherent tensions requiring ongoing negotiation: autonomy versus standardization, innovation versus equity, local responsiveness versus systemic coherence, and flexibility versus accountability. Fourth, sustainable grassroots implementation demands holistic, systemic approaches addressing multiple dimensions simultaneously: individual teacher capacity, organizational structures, policy frameworks, resource allocation, and community engagement.

These findings resonate with international research on curriculum reform and educational change. Fullan's (2007) work emphasizes that successful reform requires attending to meaning, capacity, and commitment—all evident in factors identified in this review. Similarly, Hargreaves and Fullan's (2015) emphasis on professional capital aligns with findings regarding teacher capacity, PLCs, and professional autonomy. From theoretical perspective, the Indonesian experience illuminates tensions in decentralized educational governance, with Weiler's (1990) framework helping explain both the appeal of grassroots approaches and implementation challenges.

4. CONCLUSION

This literature review provides comprehensive analysis of grassroots curriculum development model implementation in Indonesia, with particular attention to the Kurikulum Merdeka context.

There are four principal findings in this research. First, grassroots curriculum development models demonstrate strong potential for producing contextual, inclusive, and future-ready curricula aligned with Indonesia's diverse socio-cultural landscape and 21st century learning imperatives. The bottom-up approach emphasizing teacher agency, stakeholder participation, and local knowledge integration addresses limitations of traditional top-down models and aligns with decentralization policy frameworks. When effectively implemented, grassroots approaches enhance curriculum relevance, learner engagement, cultural preservation, and development of higher-order competencies.

Second, implementation of grassroots approaches faces multifaceted challenges operating at individual, organizational, and systemic levels. Teacher capacity limitations, including insufficient curriculum development knowledge,

inadequate professional preparation, and resistance to pedagogical change, constitute primary barriers. These individual challenges are compounded by structural constraints: resource inadequacies, particularly in disadvantaged regions; insufficient professional development systems; variable school leadership capacity; policy ambiguities and frequent changes; and coordination gaps in decentralized governance structures. These challenges risk creating inequitable implementation where well-resourced contexts thrive while under-resourced settings struggle.

Third, successful implementation depends on interconnected enabling factors rather than single interventions. Strong instructional leadership focusing specifically on curriculum work, professional learning communities providing collaborative structures and peer support, meaningful stakeholder participation building shared ownership, contextually responsive professional development addressing specific needs, and supportive policy environments balancing autonomy with guidance consistently characterize settings demonstrating effective grassroots implementation. These factors operate synergistically, with strength in one dimension compensating somewhat for limitations in others, while weakness across multiple dimensions creates formidable obstacles.

Fourth, Kurikulum Merdeka policy represents important progress in institutionalizing grassroots curriculum development, explicitly positioning teachers as primary curriculum developers and providing substantial implementation flexibility. Early implementation evidence shows increased teacher awareness of curriculum autonomy and appreciation for pedagogical flexibility. However, realization of policy intentions remains uneven, mediated by persistent capacity constraints, resource limitations, interpretation ambiguities, and systemic inertia. The policy's success will ultimately depend on sustained commitment to capacity building, resource provision, coherent implementation support, and responsive policy adaptation based on implementation evidence.

This review contributes to curriculum development scholarship by illuminating how grassroots models operate within diverse, decentralized educational systems characterized by significant contextual variation and capacity constraints. While existing literature primarily documents grassroots curriculum development in relatively homogeneous or well-resourced contexts, the Indonesian case reveals tensions and enabling conditions particularly relevant for large-scale implementation in complex, diverse systems.

Based on synthesized evidence, this review proposes several practical recommendations for strengthening grassroots curriculum development implementation: Comprehensive, sustained teacher capacity building; Strategic leadership development; Resource equity and infrastructure development; Coherent,

enabling policy frameworks; Participatory evaluation and learning systems; multi-stakeholder collaboration.

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